

Practical Dilemmas and Optimization Strategies of Moral Education in English Teaching of Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: This study employs a combined approach of empirical research and case study to investigate the current implementation status, practical dilemmas, and optimization strategies for integrating Moral education into the English curriculum within vocational colleges. To achieve the research objectives, an empirical survey was conducted among teachers and students at Zhenjiang Vocational and Technical College. The findings indicate that while certain achievements have been made in integrating ideological and political elements into English courses, several challenges persist. These include insufficient integration of ideological and political content with subject teaching, a shortage of teaching resources for instructors, a lack of systematic training and guidance, and students' questioning of the applicability of the course content. Finally, taking first-year students in the five-year program as an example, the study proposes four optimization strategies like learning the guiding principles of national policy documents, introducing current affairs to stimulate critical thinking, delving deeply into the connotations of traditional culture, and fully utilizing online resources.

Keywords: Vocational Colleges; English; Moral Education; Optimization

1. Introduction

"Moral education" is an educational concept first proposed in 2014, advocating the "integration of moral education into all aspects of teaching and educational reform".

Vocational colleges place particular emphasis on this pedagogical approach, actively exploring ways to integrate "moral education" into public English courses, aiming to cultivate students' ideological, political, and English literacy. However, practical implementation

still faces challenges, including insufficient integration of ideological and political content with subject teaching, a shortage of teaching resources for instructors, a lack of systematic training and guidance, and debates regarding the applicability of the content [1]. Given these circumstances, conducting an in-depth investigation and analysis of the implementation difficulties of integrating moral education into English courses within vocational colleges, and subsequently exploring and proposing feasible optimization pathways, holds profound significance for advancing the development of moral education within the English curriculum.

2. Investigation into the Current Implementation Status of Moral Education in English Courses

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current implementation status of moral education within English courses in vocational colleges, the author designed and distributed the "Questionnaire on Satisfaction with moral education in English Courses at Zhenjiang Vocational and Technical College." This questionnaire covered four dimensions, including the degree of integration of ideological and political content into the curriculum, teaching effectiveness, student receptiveness, and teacher satisfaction. The survey targeted both enrolled students across different grades and English teachers at Zhenjiang Vocational and Technical College.

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, with 271 valid questionnaires collected, representing a response rate of 90.3%. Among the valid responses, student questionnaires accounted for 70%, while teacher questionnaires comprised 30%. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert

scale design. The survey results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire Survey Results

Survey Item	Description	Score(%)
Integration of Course Content	Ideological and political content effectively integrated	60
	Low integration with disconnected content	30
	Ideological and political content not integrated	10
Teaching Effectiveness	Stimulated learning interest and increased motivation	55
	No significant change observed	25
	Produced negative effects	20
Student Receptiveness (Satisfaction Score)	Overall Satisfaction (out of 5 points)	3.8
Teacher Satisfaction (Satisfaction Score)	Overall Satisfaction (out of 5 points)	4.0

Regarding the impact of curriculum-based moral education on teaching effectiveness, a dedicated survey revealed that when students were asked about its influence on learning motivation and academic outcomes, approximately 55% of respondents explicitly stated that the integration of moral elements in English instruction effectively stimulated their learning interest and significantly enhanced classroom engagement. However, notably, 25% of students reported perceiving no significant changes in their learning motivation or knowledge acquisition. These contrasting findings demonstrate the positive motivational effect of this educational reform on certain student cohorts while highlighting room for improvement in its universal effectiveness [2]. Concerning teaching effectiveness, when asked about the impact of curriculum-based moral education on learning motivation and outcomes, approximately 55% of students reported that it stimulated their interest in learning and increased their motivation. Conversely, 25% of students stated they perceived no significant change.

In terms of student receptiveness, the overall satisfaction score was 3.8 out of 5 points, indicating basic student recognition of the initiative. Specifically, about 65% of students felt the moral content positively influenced their values and worldview. However, nearly 20%

expressed doubts about the practical applicability of the course content.

Regarding teacher satisfaction, the overall score was 4.0, slightly higher than that of students. This suggests that the majority of teachers acknowledge the educational value of integrating moral education. Nevertheless, teachers commonly reported encountering difficulties during implementation, such as a scarcity of teaching resources and insufficient training support.

Beyond the questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with three English teachers and seven students from different grades to obtain more nuanced and diverse feedback.

The teacher interviews revealed widespread agreement with the underlying concept of curriculum-based moral education and recognition of its importance for students' moral development. However, teachers faced significant challenges in practical implementation, notably a scarcity of teaching resources and a lack of systematic training and guidance [3]. Teachers pointed out that existing course materials often fail to adequately incorporate ideological and political elements, making it difficult to find effective entry points during teaching. Several teachers suggested that institutions should provide more teaching resources, case studies, and pedagogical guidance to facilitate better implementation.

The student interviews indicated that students generally perceive the moral content in English courses as helpful for understanding social issues and national policies, thereby enhancing their sense of social responsibility. However, some students reported that certain course content felt disconnected from their daily lives, leading to diminished interest. Students advocated for content that is more relevant to their lived experiences and suggested incorporating more interactive and practical opportunities to enhance learning outcomes. While students broadly recognized the value of curriculum-based moral education for shaping their values and worldview, they offered suggestions for improvement, such as increasing the content's interest level, practical relevance, and interactivity [4].

In summary, the implementation of curriculum-based moral education in English

courses within vocational colleges has yielded certain achievements and gained basic recognition from both teachers and students. The content has positively influenced students' values and worldview, stimulated learning interest, and enhanced motivation. Nevertheless, several challenges persist during implementation, for example, a disconnect between moral content and subject teaching, difficulties faced by teachers, including a scarcity of teaching resources and insufficient systematic training and guidance, as well as students' skepticism regarding the applicability of the course content.

To address these issues, the following recommendations are proposed. Firstly, deepening the understanding of the core principles and scope of curriculum-based moral education, enhancing teachers' accumulation of pedagogical experience and relevant materials for moral cultivation, and enriching evaluation criteria to achieve the organic integration of knowledge transmission and value guidance are highly used [5]. Furthermore, it is recommended to strengthen the integration and utilization of teaching resources, innovate teaching methodologies, and refine the evaluation system to provide comprehensive and effective support for the development of curriculum-based moral education in vocational college English courses.

3. Optimization Strategies for Moral Education in English Courses

To optimize the integration of moral education within English instruction, the author conducted a case study focusing on first-year students in the five-year program at their vocational college.

This cohort utilizes the 2023 latest edition textbooks published by Higher Education Press, namely English Books 1 and 2. The program allocates 72 class hours per semester. These textbooks were developed in accordance with the guiding principles of national policies on vocational education materials and the requirements outlined in the English Curriculum Standards for Five-Year Higher Vocational Education (2023 Edition) issued by the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education. However, as these textbooks are currently in the piloting phase within five-year higher vocational classrooms, a comprehensive system for moral education practice and research has not yet been fully established. Consequently, there exists a lack of detailed implementation and research plans for reforming English teaching using this textbook series to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education.

The author categorized and tabulated the unit themes and reading topics from English Books 1 and 2, with the results presented in Table 2. The analysis reveals that the primary themes covered in Books 1 and 2 encompass family and society, health, the natural environment, history and tradition, personal growth, and the internet and technology. When integrating moral education into the English curriculum in vocational colleges, teachers should extract moral elements from the textual themes, stimulate students' moral reflection through cross-cultural comparisons, and integrate correct value orientations into instructional explanations.

Table 2. Thematic Content of English Volumes 1 and 2

English Volume 1			English Volume 2		
Unit	Topic	Reading	Unit	Topic	Reading
1	A New School	A New Life in a New School	1	Improving Yourself	Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone
2	Family and Community	Family Discussion on My Major	2	Keeping Healthy	My First Visit to a TCM Hospital
3	Leisure Time	Stay Active, Stay Healthy	3	Volunteer Spirit	Stories from Volunteers
4	Daily Diet and Daily Wear	A Health Diet: Q & A	4	Role Models	The Man Who Welded the Heart of Rockets
5	Natural Environment	Global Warming ---- Help Stop It!	5	Social Rules	Unwritten Rules
6	Life on the Internet	Internet and My Life	6	Smart Technology	Yinchuan: A Pilot Smart City in China
7	Historical Figures and Events	The Travels of Marco Polo	7	Space Exploration	A Class from the Tiangong Space Station
8	Time to Celebrate	New Year Celebrations	8	Responsible Travel	Ecotourism

3.1 Learning the Guiding Principles of National Policy Documents

Based on unit themes, teachers can introduce bilingual (Chinese-English) materials reflecting the spirit of national policies and guidance from government work reports into vocational college English classrooms [6]. For instance, English Volume 1, Unit 6 ("Life on the Internet"), features the text "Internet and My Life," which describes the protagonist's daily experiences with online learning and living, concluding that the internet profoundly influences lifestyles, work, and study methods. English Volume 2, Unit 6 ("Smart Technology"), displays images related to smart technology in its warming-up section.

For these technology-themed units, teachers integrating moral education may introduce key concepts from leaders' speeches, such as "Building China into a global leader in science and technology by 2035", "New type of whole-nation system", "Scientist spirit".

Through studying these policy documents, students will implicitly recognize how following our leaders' guidance has accelerated comprehensive reforms in science and technology—a primary reason for the increasing convenience in their daily lives.

Similarly, for environmental themes like English Volume 1, Unit 5 ("Natural Environment"), includes the text "Global Warming—Help Stop It!", which calls for individual action to combat global warming and protect Earth. English Volume 2, Unit 8 ("Responsible Travel"), features the text "Ecotourism." For these units, teachers should guide students to study relevant content like "We will advance the Beautiful China Initiative, take a holistic and systematic approach to conserving and improving mountain, water, forest, farmland, grassland, and desert ecosystems, coordinate industrial restructuring, pollution control, ecological conservation, and climate response, and jointly advance carbon reduction, pollution reduction, green expansion, and growth to promote prioritized, economical, intensive, and green low-carbon development". Students should also learn about leaders' major directive to "promote green development and foster harmony between humanity and nature". Concrete examples, such as showcasing ecological changes before and after the Yangtze River fishing ban, can help students visualize

the tangible impact of national policies.

3.2 Introducing Current Affairs to Stimulate Critical Thinking

Students are not merely inhabitants of an ivory tower but members of society. Vocational college students are particularly susceptible to misguided value orientations. Guiding them to engage with current social issues cultivates awareness of domestic and international affairs, strengthens their sense of responsibility, and fosters a new generation attentive to national development, political discourse, and global events—ultimately achieving holistic virtue cultivation through education.

A successful teaching case is shared. While teaching Unit 3 "Leisure Time" (which explores hobbies in free time) from English Volume 1, the 2023 Israel-Palestine conflict erupted. After completing the unit, the instructor analyzed the historical context of the conflict for students, showed bilingual (Chinese-English) videos documenting the crisis, and emphasized that they were not born in an era of peace, but in a peaceful nation. It is our motherland's prosperity and strength that enables us to discuss leisurely pursuits in classrooms, rather than fear a future with no tomorrow.

While teaching Unit 1 "Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone" from English Volume 2, the theatrical release of YOLO (You Only Live Once) coincided with our lessons. By leveraging the film's English title, I introduced students to the inspiring transformation journey of the protagonist (and director Jia Ling), guiding them to cultivate self-awareness, practice self-acceptance, and courageously challenge themselves beyond comfort zones.

This teaching case demonstrates significant pedagogical value. Current affairs education extends beyond major global events to encompass issues impacting daily life. Appropriately selected news topics can guide students toward sound value orientations, foster responsible citizenship, promote whole-person development, and enhance self-cognitive abilities.

3.3 Delving into the Connotations of Traditional Culture

Teachers should integrate excellent Chinese

traditional culture into the moral education within English courses in conjunction with the teaching content. For instance, in the "Warming Up" section of Unit 7 "Historical Figures and Events" in English (Book 1), topics such as Bi Sheng's movable-type printing, Cai Lun's paper-making technique, Watt's invention of the steam engine, and the Wright brothers' invention of the airplane are covered. Beyond fulfilling the basic teaching objectives, teachers can guide students to compare the timelines, invention processes, and global impacts of China's Four Great Inventions with those of the airplane and steam engine. By contrasting the technological achievements of different civilizations, students can gain a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and the significance of technological innovation, thereby enhancing their cultural confidence and broadening their international perspectives. In the "Integrated Skills" section of this unit, there is an information-matching exercise featuring Confucius, Li Bai, and Marie Curie. During the teaching process, teachers can present the development and expansion of Confucius Institutes worldwide. Since the establishment of the first Confucius Institute in 2004, a total of 465 Confucius Institutes and 713 Confucius Classrooms have been established in universities across 123 countries and regions globally [7]. These institutes have made substantial contributions to disseminating Chinese culture and promoting cultural exchanges. By informing students about the importance and significance of Confucius Institutes in international cultural exchanges, teachers can not only bolster students' cultural confidence and national pride but also inspire them to contemplate how they, as young individuals in the new era, can contribute to cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries [8].

3.4 Fully Utilizing Online Resources

The "Internet Plus" initiative provides new pathways for moral education, while shifting pedagogical approaches necessitate reorganization of teaching content. Teachers should leverage platforms like WeChat public accounts, video resources, and MOOC websites to deliver comprehensive moral education [9]. Furthermore, this textbook series includes the accompanying "Zhi Xue Yuan" app. Through this platform, educators can curate or design English learning materials integrating moral

elements, enabling students to deeply comprehend socialist core values and professional ethics while acquiring language skills. Utilizing the app's interactive functions, teachers can organize discussions, competitions, and other activities to help students internalize moral knowledge through practice, thereby enhancing social responsibility and professional competence. Additionally, big data analysis of student learning behaviors allows personalized push of learning resources combining moral content with English, facilitating tailored teaching approaches and achieving subtle integration of moral education within vocational college English courses [10].

4. Conclusion

The construction of the moral system in vocational college English courses is a dynamic and multidimensional systematic project, and its complexity is mainly reflected in the balance of the triple structural tension.

The dual integration of value guidance and skill transmission requiring solving the temporal matching problem between knowledge transmission and value penetration.

Vertical connection between top-level policy design and grassroots practice (requiring the establishment of a dynamic adjustment mechanism for school-based implementation plans)

Horizontal synergy between traditional cultural inheritance and cutting-edge industrial innovation requiring the development of ideological and political carriers with modern vocational education characteristics.

This deep-seated contradiction determines that the construction of moral education in the curriculum must construct a tripartite collaborative evolution model.

At the institutional level, it is necessary to improve the system supply and establish a long-term mechanism that includes curriculum standard review, teaching resource library construction, and cross departmental linkage such as incorporating ideological and political education into the teaching quality diagnosis and improvement system.

The teacher community should break through the teaching paradigm through action research and develop a dual track teaching design of

"language ability cultivation x value shaping" referring to the "modular ideological and political resource package" paradigm proposed in the 2023 curriculum standards of Jiangsu Province.

Student subjects need to realize value internalization in project-based learning such as practicing professional ethics through the "the Belt and Road" cross-border e-commerce training and other real scenarios.

Based on the practical path of the "Guidelines for Ideological and Political Construction of Vocational Education Curriculum" issued by the Ministry of Education, the system optimization can be achieved through a three-stage spiral promotion mechanism, and the ultimately formed curriculum ideological and political ecosystem will accurately connect with the "Made in China 2025" talent quality matrix, cultivate composite technical and skilled talents with a new craftsman spirit (a professional attitude of striving for excellence+a value standpoint of serving the country with science and technology) through the integration of morality and technology, and provide key support for the development paradigm of vocational education with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

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